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Mr. HART'S
SERMON,
AT THE
FUNERAL
OF
Mr. ELLS.



The earnest desire and endeavour of the true,
and evangelical minister, that his hearers may
have a proper remembrance of the gospel after
his death,

CONSIDERED AND IMPROVED,

IN A

DISCOURSE

AT THE

F U N E R A L

OF

The Reverend

Mr. NATHANIEL EELLS,

Pastor of a church in STONINGTON.

JUNE 3, 1786.

By LEVI HART, A. M.

Pastor of a church in PRESTON.

“Your fathers, where are they? and the prophets, do they live for ever?” Zech. i. 5.

“Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord.”

Rev. xiv. 13.

NEW - L O N D O N :

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The present state and all history of the city
and county of London and the parish of
St. Martin in the Vintry of the bishopric of London
in the diocese of London

CONSIDERED AND APPROVED

DISCOVERED

FURNISHED



A funeral SERMON.

II PETER I. 15.

“ Moreover, I will endeavour that you may be able,
“ after my decease, to have these things always in
“ remembrance.”

THE apostle Peter is supposed to have written this divinely inspired letter about a year before his martyrdom, which he is said to have suffered at Rome, under the bloody Nero ; in the fourteenth year of his reign, and the sixty-eighth of the Christian æra.

The text, in connexion with the preceding verse, serves to shew that it was written under the certain apprehension of his approaching dissolution. “ Knowing, said he, that I must shortly put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.”*---Referring, most probably, to that memorable conference with his divine Master, when Jesus, just after his resurrection, commanded Peter to follow him---in token of his readiness to suffer for him the same kind of death which he had suffered.†

In the view of this solemn event, he is particularly solicitous that the important truths of Christianity, which he had taught, should live in the minds of his hearers after his death ; and produce the most happy effects, even their holiness and salvation.

In

* 2 Pet. I. 14. † John xxi. 18, 19, 20.

In this, our Apostle speaks the language of every faithful minister of Christ. All such desire and pursue the same object. If not with an ardor equal to his, yet in a manner expressive of a desire, for this happy event, superiour to every earthly attachment; ---evincing that they have no greater joy, in regard to their children--*their people*, than that they should walk in the truth; not only while they are living, but after they are dead.

The subject and occasion will lead us,

I. To point out some of *the things* referred to in the text.

II. To shew what is implied in *that* remembrance of these things which people should retain after the death of their ministers.

III. To enquire *why* all faithful ministers earnestly desire and endeavour that this may be the case with their people.

I. We are to point out some of the things referred to in the text; ---which the christian minister would have remembered by his people after he is dead.

These are the things of the gospel, or the christian religion in general, comprising the truths of natural religion, and the truth and divinity of the Mosaic and Christian revelations: ---considered in a doctrinal, experimental and practical light.

But we shall, at present, only just notice a few particulars, expressed or referred to in the context.

1. The sovereign freedom of divine grace in the salvation of sinners. This is implied in the apostle's address at the beginning of this epistle. "To them who have obtained like precious faith."† The Greek most properly signifies *to receive or obtain by lot*, as distinguished from that which is the proper fruit of our own exertions. The

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† Context, verse 1.

good obtained in the present case is faith, "like precious faith" with the apostles. And it is obtained, in every instance, essentially in the same way, even by sovereign, free grace. This truth runs through this epistle, and the sacred writings in general. And it will appear with the clearest evidence, if we look into the accounts of the several Evangelists, as to the manner in which the apostles, in general, obtained this faith. Peter and his companions received it in a manner exactly comporting with the preceding observations.* Who can suggest a reason why these base fishermen should be called and saved rather than others of their age and nation? The truth is equally evident from the call of the other apostles, and the evangelists:—But I mention none but *the persecuting Saul*, that amazing monument of sovereign mercy! whose wonderful conversion, and call to the apostleship are particularly narrated in the Acts of the Apostles.†—And a divine reason assigned by himself, in one of his epistles, even that the riches of divine mercy in his salvation might be matter of encouragement to believing sinners in all future generations.‡

These instances of divine mercy, to mention no more, illustrate and confirm the apostolic testimony that "it is not of him who willeth, or of him who runneth, but of God—who sheweth mercy."§

Indeed, the sovereign freedom of divine grace in the salvation of sinners is, not only the doctrine of the inspired writers, but is essentially connected with the scripture account of man's sin and ruin, as the fruit of the first apostacy.

If, in consequence of the original lapse, the whole race is naturally under the governing influence of the carnal mind—or disposition, which is, in its tendency and operations, enmity against God—If all have sinned and

* Mat. iv. 18—22. Mark i. 16. 26. § Acts ix. 1—22, & xxii. 1—16. || 1 Tim. i. 12—16. † Rom. ix. 16.

come short of the glory of God, and are the fit objects of divine wrath, to be displayed in the execution of the threatned punishment; all which the holy scriptures abundantly confirm,—it is almost intuitively evident, that, if any are saved at all, it must be by sovereign, free grace.

The doctrines of man's ruin by sin, and recovery by free grace, illustrate and confirm each other.—They are capital points in the christian revelation: and, as such, the faithful minister wishes they may be deeply impressed on the minds of his people—even so that these impressions may be lasting, when he is silent in the grave.

2. *The way* in which sovereign grace effects the salvation of sinners. It is “through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ,”* and by faith in him.

Though the grace, which saves sinners, is free and sovereign, as it respects the guilty, it is not, however, bestowed without good reason, as it respects the divine operations: but in such a way as most decisively displays the supreme rectitude of the divine moral government. It is “grace which reigns through righteousness, to eternal life, by Jesus Christ our Lord.”† So that the divine bestowment of salvation to the sinner, is an expression of respect to the righteousness and atonement of Christ: especially, as it is bestowed in the way of faith—so that “he who *believeth shall be saved, but he who believeth not shall be damned.*”‡ And,

Such is the nature of that precious faith, connected with salvation, that its distinguishing quality consists in a cordial approbation of the atoning righteousness of Christ, and resting on that righteousness alone for salvation.

3. The power and grace of God are eminently displayed in the bestowment of this salvation, in all its parts;

* Context, verse 1. † Rom. v. 21.

parts ;||—The participation of the divine nature, by the sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit ; the deliverance from the lusts and corruptions of this vain world, by those sanctifying influences ; and the divine, efficacious call to that glory, and virtue, which is the christian's portion.

4. Believers have exceedingly great and precious promises*—as they respect the divine presence, and care in this mortal life—the bestowment of every needful good in the present state, and, in the world to come, eternal life.

5. We are to give all diligence to make our calling and election sure—by making progress in the christian life, and adding the various branches of the christian temper and character to that precious faith, which divine grace freely bestows.†

6. Those who abound in these various graces, are fruitful in the knowledge of God—or, they grow in grace, and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. But those who are destitute of these are, spiritually, blind, insensible of the weight and worth of divine and eternal things : And have, in effect, “ forgotten that they were purged from their old sins”—or that conversion changes the heart and life. And they are, indeed, among those unhappy men who are destitute of that precious faith which is essentially connected with all the branches of the christian temper, and with final salvation.

II. We are to shew what is implied in that remembrance of these things which people should retain after the death of their ministers.

In general, it is such as will answer the designs of the christian ministry, and issue in the final salvation of the

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hearers.

|| Context, ver. 3,4. * Context, ver. 4. † Context, ver. 5,6,7.

TO A FUNERAL SERMON.

hearers. Such a remembrance implies, that the truths and duties of christianity, exhibited in the evangelical ministry, engage the solemn attention of the hearers, and are "received into good and honest hearts"—not as the word of man, but, as they are indeed, the word of God.

That the hearers, like new-born babes, "desire the sincere milk of the word, that they may grow thereby," and "obey from the heart that form of sound words which is delivered to them."

Where this is the case, the word preached will make lasting impressions on the heart, and *the glad tidings of great joy will be ever new*. The happy subjects of this grace will be sweetly established in the truth, and animated to every good word and work.

True religion is a rational and most glorious system.—And those who duly remember, genuine, evangelical preaching, know it to be so. They experience its transforming influence, and find the truth of those words of Jesus, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself."¶ They taste the peculiar excellence of christian truth, and grow in grace and in the knowledge of their Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. They endure as seeing him who is invisible; and it is their meat and drink to do the will of God.

III. We are now to shew why all faithful ministers earnestly desire and endeavour that this may be the case with their hearers, after their death.

Among the many reasons which might be adduced, the following deserve particular attention :

1. Such ministers know that christianity descended from heaven, or is a revelation from God. This animated our apostle to that earnest desire mentioned in the text, as appears by the words immediately following, "For we have

¶ John vii. 17.

have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known to you, the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."§

And all true, christian ministers are as really persuaded of the truth and divinity of the christian revelation, as the apostle Peter, though not, in all respects, in the same manner. In addition to the external arguments, they have a divine evidence, in its favour, arising from *the truths revealed*. And are sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of the heavenly inheritance.†

Possessed of this scheme of divine truth, they are desirous that their hearers may know its worth, and feel its power.

2. They know this divine system to be of great worth and importance in itself, and to the souls of men. The leading subjects of this revelation, are the display of divine perfection, in the work of redemption—the manner in which sinners are brought home to God by Christ Jesus, and made the subjects of that glorious redemption—and the principal events which respect the church, down to the second coming of Christ, and the consummation of all things—comprising the final state, both of the righteous and the wicked. In view of the reality and importance of these things, the faithful minister earnestly desires that they may be remembered by his hearers after his death.

3. Such ministers are deeply concerned for the honour of Christ, in the salvation of their hearers. This will be effected, if they duly remember these things.

The faithful minister has embarked *his all* with the glory of Christ, in the success of his kingdom, for the sake of which he "counts all things but loss." And, for many obvious reasons, he will be especially interested in the success of this good cause among the people of his own dear.

§ 2 Peter i. 16. † Ephes. i. 13, 14.—iv. 30.

dear charge. And, for the same reasons that he seeks its success while he lives, he will desire that it may prosper after his death.

The men of this world desire the riches and glories of the present life for their children after they shall be taken away. Even so will the faithful minister desire the salvation of his hearers—*his children*, after *his* death.

4. Such ministers earnestly desire that their people may duly remember these things after *they* are dead, that they may meet and live with them in the heavenly state.

This is a great consolation to God's people, but especially, to faithful ministers, in death, that they expect to meet and live with their christian friends in a better world.

The Apostles and primitive Christians, were exceedingly animated in sufferings and death, in the joyful expectation of such a meeting—at the gathering together to Christ Jesus, of which they speak †—and, in the view of which, they were prevented from sorrowing, at the graves of their friends, as those who had no hope. ‡

How painful must be the parting of christians, in death, if it were final! But how does the tyrant assume an angel's form, when they view him as sent by their heavenly father, to translate them to the society of the redeemed who are gone before, and to prepare them to welcome those who shall come after!

But evangelical ministers, above all men, must be joyful in this meeting with each other, and with the people of their charge—for whom (to use the strong figure of the great apostle) they “travail in birth, till Christ is formed in them.”*

How happy that meeting in which he who sowed, and they who reap, shall rejoice together, in the presence and glory of their God and Saviour! and join to bear a part
in

† 2 Thes. ii. 1. ‡ 1 Thes. iv. 13. * Galat. iv. 19.

in the song, to him who loved them and washed them from their sins in his own blood.

Happy ministers, who are thus blessed in their labours! and happy people who have such a faithful minister, and wisely improve the price they enjoy to be wise to salvation!

IMPROVEMENT.

As the aged---venerable minister and apostle, whose words have been considered, spake the language of all faithful preachers of the gospel, a variety of useful and important reflections will be excited.

Many of these must be passed in silence, but those which follow deserve our particular attention.

I. He that desireth the office of a bishop, desireth a good work.

If such be the object of the christian ministry, even that our people may duly remember the sacred truths of Christianity—who, not a stranger to the excellence of religion, and the worth of souls, but would earnestly desire to be qualified for this ministry, and bear a part in it?

How sweetly must that life be spent, which is devoted to the service of Christ, in this best employment? and how excellently fitted is this course of labour to form the man of God, for the still more refined service and enjoyments of the heavenly state!

In what other employment, is there such an ample field for the exertion of christian benevolence to men, or of thankfulness to God for his unspeakable gift? Admitting that there are many difficulties in our work---what are those difficulties, compared with the power and grace of Christ, which are on our side? or, with the privilege of being admitted to spend that life, and those talents which are redeemed by his blood, in thankful exertions for his glory in the salvation of his church---with the
animating

animating prospect of happy success? And that, not only while we live, but after our departure, by the pious and lasting impressions of divine truth, on the minds of our hearers?

II. We, who are the favoured preachers of the blessed gospel, have the most weighty inducements to fidelity in our work. "It is required of stewards that a man be found faithful." How important that we are "good stewards" of this "manifold grace of God."

Do we wish that our hearers may duly remember these things after our death, we must labour that they may be properly affected with them while we live.

Here, the whole extent of the ministerial work invites our attention----but this is a field by far too wide to be attempted, at present.

May we all obtain mercy to be faithful and successful in the service of so good a master. And, in particular, may all our hearts be one, in this most important cause; that our prayers be not hindered, or our exertions counteracted, in attempting to "strengthen the things which remain and are ready to die."

Who have such bonds of union, or inducements, to be compared with ours, to the most harmonious affection and exertion?

Our province is to exalt the Redeemer, in the promotion of his kingdom of love and peace;---that the God of peace may prosper our attempts, and dwell among us.

We are, especially, called to it at this time of the prevalence of evil---when so many are pursuing, with heedless steps, the broad and downward road!

The certain prospect that "we must put off these tabernacles," and give up the account of our stewardship, should engage us to the most serious diligence in our work. "The time of our departure is at hand." The divine language to each of us is, "What thou doest,

doest, do quickly." Our approaching departure is no less sure than was that of the Apostle Peter. How watchful, how prayerful should we be, lest after preaching to others, any one of us should be a cast-away!

III. As Jesus Christ and his gospel, are the same, through all ages, so his faithful ministers are of *one spirit*, through all their successions.

As in the evangelical ministry in general, so in particular, in the present subject—they are all united in ardent desire, and painful exertion, that their people may retain a proper sense of the things of the gospel, when *they* are no more on earth.

This was eminently true of the venerable, and aged minister, whose funeral solemnities we are met to attend.

Having received a learned and religious education, and being early impressed with a pious concern for the honour of Christ, in the salvation of his church—he consecrated his talents to the service of God's house, and devoted his life to the work of the christian ministry in this place. And, God has graciously continued him to this people, to a *good old age*.

Possessed of good natural abilities—improved by an acquaintance with literature in general,—he subordinated all to the gospel of Christ.

Theological subjects and improvements were his chief delight. He was a well read and judicious divine, a fast friend to pure Christianity, and a faithful preacher of its sacred truths.

The excellent spirit which was displayed in his preaching, and whole deportment, greatly recommended the religion which he taught—and shewed him to be "*an Israelite indeed*." He deserved and possessed the character of a peace-maker, and we trust is now in possession of the reward.

It

It is superfluous to observe to those who knew him, that he was exceeded by few, in the amiable sweetness displayed in the more private walks of life—and that he did honour to christianity, and to human nature, in the domestic and social relations. He exhibited an excellent example, as a husband, a parent, a friend, a christian, and a minister.—And, what shall we say more? we are in a large field, and the time would fail us to descend to particulars.

One thing, however, must not be omitted, his characteristic distinction is marked in our text. His most earnest and unremitted endeavours were exerted for the salvation of his flock. And, he was greatly solicitous that they might have a saving remembrance of the things of the gospel after his departure.

With unabating diligence, he taught them, “publicly, and from house to house.” And that, under the decays of age, and in the midst of many discouragements.

When taken off from his public labours, and under the extreme weakness of approaching dissolution—the salvation of his people was still on his heart, and some of his latest hours were spent in committing them to the shepherd of Israel.

Thus he lived---and thus he died---in the calm serenity and heart-felt joy of the christian faith and hope.

May surviving ministers catch his falling mantle,---walk by the same rule, and, when they have served their generation by the will of God, sleep in Jesus---and have a happy part in the gathering together to Christ Jesus, of which the scriptures speak. †

IV. The

† The following particulars, relating to this truly good minister of Christ, it is presumed, will be acceptable to the reader.

His father was the reverend Mr. Nathaniel Eells of Scituate, in Massachusetts. He was born July 11, 1711. He received his education at Harvard College, in Cambridge—and was ordained to the pastoral

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IV. The subject and occasion call on us to take part in the afflictions of the bereaved family,—who will be pleased to accept the sympathizing address.

—To be deprived of such a husband and parent is, indeed, a heavy affliction!—But, even this, implies that his life was a great blessing.

You

pastoral office over the church in the east society, in Stonington, June 14th, 1783.

He continued to discharge the various branches of ministerial duty, with uncommon punctuality, till about three months before his death.—Which was occasioned by a large hemorrhage of the lungs, followed by a wasting cough and fever; which reduced his mortal frame, already enfeebled with age, and the labours of his office.

His death was on the first of June, 1786—the seventy-sixth year of his age, and fifty-third of his ministry.

Through the several stages of his decline, he manifested an entire resignation to the will of God—and appeared to possess an uncommon share of that inward, sweet, and calm serenity which is peculiar to genuine christianity. Indeed, he was satisfied with life, and waited with ardent, but submissive longing, “to be unclothed, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”

To some neighbouring ministers, who visited him a little before his death—after much pious discourse, becoming the solemn occasion, having earnestly requested their attention to his bereaved and broken flock—and, repeatedly joined in prayer, with the appearance of much christian faith and fervour,—while they and others present were buried in sorrow, in a sense of their loss, and that of the church—he, all calm and serene, gave them his parting hand, with this emphatical sentence, *Farewell—we'll meet in heaven.*

He added no more.—And what more, or better could be added?—The most stupid, had they been present, must have felt, and the most obdurate acknowledged, the divine force of christianity. They would have said, “Let us die the death of the righteous, and let our last end be like his.”

Christians, and especially ministers, must be strengthened and animated at such a scene. It is more blessed to be that humble believer in Jesus, on a dying bed, than to be the greatest monarch, in the height of his exaltation.

He left a widow, five sons and five daughters. The eldest of his sons is the reverend Mr. John Bells, a worthy and useful minister of the gospel, at Glastenbury.

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You have been the favoured family, who have enjoyed his domestic instructions, his example, and his prayers.

Solicitous for the salvation of his people in common, he could not be unmindful of yours. He must, therefore, have exerted every endeavour that you might remember these things after his departure.

You will be thankful that you have enjoyed so rich a blessing ; that it was continued so long ;---and that so many prayers have been laid up, by your best earthly friend, for the blessing of God to attend you after his death. And, you will be careful so to remember his pious instructions and profit by his example, as to follow his steps, and prepare to meet him in the world of harmony—the family of love.

“Leave thy fatherless children, saith the God of grace, I will preserve them alive, and let thy widows trust in me.” *

With the word of God for your guide, and his grace for

By the special direction of Mr. Eells, the following sacred passages were read, at the time of his interment ; and they are inserted here by particular desire.

“Jesus said, I am the resurrection, and the life ; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live.

“And whosoever liveth, and believeth in me ; shall never die ; believest thou this ?

“Marvel not at this ; for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice.

“And shall come forth : they that have done good unto the resurrection of life ; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.

“In my father’s house are many mansions ; if it were not so, would have told you ; I go to prepare a place for you.

“And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto my self ; that where I am, there ye may be also.

“For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand, the latter day upon the earth.

“And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.”

* Jere. xlix. 2.

for your support, may you honour God in this affliction, and in all changes of this *changing* world—and finally have a happy meeting, in the kingdom of God above.

V. The subject applies to this bereaved church and congregation.

Dear friends,

You have, indeed, sustained a great loss.—You are not alone in lamenting it.—All, who knew the worth of your venerable—aged minister, and whose hearts are at all susceptible of feeling, join you in the lamentation, “Our father, our father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!”

While, therefore, we take part in your affliction, you will suffer the word of exhortation, that you may not lose the benefit it is fitted to convey.

That the issue may be thus happy, you must keep in remembrance the things of the gospel, which have been urged, by your departed minister, with such benevolent concern for your best good. Without this, it will avail you nothing that you have been long favoured with a faithful minister, who has watched for your souls as one who expected to give an account.

Alas, how dreadful is the thought! that any of you should die in your sins, and your ministers be a witness against you at the awful tribunal!----May this be never realized, in fact---but may you have these things always in remembrance.

We commit you to the Shepherd of Israel, with earnest prayer, that he will preserve this bereaved flock; that you may duly value gospel institutions; profit by your former privileges; and, in due time, be united in the settlement of another able, and faithful minister of the New Testament,—and that you and your children may profit by his ministry, and be wise to salvation.

Finally,

SERMON

Let us all, dear brethren and sisters, bear a part in the affliction of this departed family and flock, — wisely improve the call of Providence to be also ready, — watch and pray always, that we may be accounted worthy to escape the evil which is coming on the world, and to stand before the Son of Man, at the great day: "When multitudes and people" must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ, to receive according to the deeds done in the body." —

May this solemn thought attend us through the remainder of life. — And, may we obtain mercy to be accepted at the last, through Christ Jesus.

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